

Email for Kentucky Students: Issues and Answers

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Background

A. KETS Master Plan

The original Master Plan for Education Technology was adopted in May, 1992, and serves as the document upon which the Department of Education relies to ensure faithfulness to the original farsighted vision of technology as an enhancement, and, in fact, a lever for implementing education reform. The Master Plan is an administrative regulation by reference. The Master Plan specifically discusses the importance of communication tools (i.e., email) for every student (see details on benefits of student email to students, teachers, and community below). The Master Plan line item "student instructional software" included the funds for a student email account for every child in the state. Other KETS Master Plan line items also included the costs necessary to fund student email in the district (e.g., instructional fileserver, networks, network operation software, etc). In 1998 KETS received surplus funding and also had a strategy to maximize e-rate discounts which allowed student email and all other Phase 1 components of KETS to be fully funded. Therefore student email is law and is fully funded. KETS also allowed local and federal funds (e.g., TLCF) to be used to put student email in place.

From this beginning, the Kentucky Education Technology System (KETS) has been designed to serve the students of Kentucky, not just administrators and teachers. The original vision, and the vision that persists with most educators and citizens today, is that all the resources of KETS are to be brought to bear to enhance and support Kentucky students' efforts to reach proficiency with up-to-date tools.

It may be worthwhile to review brief excerpts from the 1992 KETS Master

Plan to remind ourselves and others of 1. the KETS Objectives and Student Benefits; 2. Program Guidelines; and 3. the Relationship between KETS and other Kentucky Education Reform Act Initiatives.

1. KETS Objectives and Student Benefits

Among the objectives of the Kentucky Education Technology System are the following statements from the Master Plan:

"Technical Skills for all Kentucky children. Ability to Access, Analyze & Communicate Information" Pages 2-4

"Benefits to Student Learning. KETS will improve student learning as follows:

- Development of communication skills through writing and the exchange of information with students at other sites.**
- Development of thinking and problem solving skills through skills by analyzing information with technology tools.**
- Development of student awareness of a multi-cultural world view through telecommunications access and communication with students at other schools throughout the world.**
- Encouragement of respect of rights of others and ethical issues in using school technology assets" Pages 2-5**

"Enhanced Communications. KETS will facilitate communications

- 1. Between two individuals, among several individuals, from one individual to a select list or network wide.**
- 2. Through transmittal of memos, letters, bulletins, reports and documents.**

3. Through the development of electronic communities" Pages 2-5

"Benefits to Teacher Productivity. KETS will increase teacher productivity through telecommunications access for improved communication among teachers, parents and students" Pages 2-5

"KETS supports teacher, student and parent communication and collaboration" Pages 2-5

Software and Hardware Tools available for students to communicate in the classroom include " electronic mail, electronic forms, workstations, wide area network servers" Pages 3-7

"KETS is designed to be highly accessible to staff and students" Pages 3-4

"KETS will allow students to assume greater responsibility for their learning and empower them by widening access to images, sounds, communication capabilities and information that define the world in which they compete" Pages 3-5

2. Program Guidelines

In the portion of the Master Plan dealing with KETS Program Guidelines, one finds the following statements:

- Place technology in the hands of learners.**
 - One workstation for each six students will be acquired to support KETS.**
 - Student workstations will be connected to a statewide network, thereby providing student access to the whole world of information.**

- **Change the nature of present teaching practices rather than simply supplement them.**
 - Technology competencies will be integrated into the core curriculum.
 - Technology will be as a tool for accessing, analyzing, and communicating information.

3. Relationship between KETS and other Kentucky Education Reform Act Initiatives

Finally, in the section describing the relationship between KETS and other Kentucky Education Reform act initiatives, we find the following statements:

- KETS will open up possibilities for information access and communication that is unmatched in any other educational setting.
- KETS will allow students to assume greater responsibility for their learning and empower them to learn by widening access to images, sounds, communication capabilities, and information that define the world in which they will compete.
- KETS will enrich the community/school relationship by making school services more accessible to the community.
- KETS will open up a new environment where students, teachers, and administrators can do what humans do best -experiment, explore, and expand the realm of the human mind.

It is difficult to imagine how any of these objectives or benefits or guidelines can be accomplished by depriving students of access to using a KETS-standard email account.

B. Kentucky's Learning Goals and Academic Expectations and the Core Content for Assessment

Similarly, when one reviews Kentucky's Learning Goals and Academic Expectations and the Core Content for Assessment one finds statements that imply there should be universal access to email. For example, consider the following Academic Expectations:

Communications:

- Students use reference tools such as dictionaries, almanacs, encyclopedias, and computer reference programs and research tools such as interviews and surveys to find the information they need to meet specific demands, explore interests, or solve specific problems.
- Students write using appropriate forms, conventions, and styles to communicate ideas and information to different audiences for different purposes.
- Students use computers and other kinds of technology to collect, organize, and communicate information and ideas.

Science:

- Students understand scientific ways of thinking and working and use those methods to solve real-life problems.

Social Studies:

- Students observe, analyze, and interpret human behaviors, social groupings, and institutions to better understand people and the relationships among individuals and among groups.
- Students interact effectively and work cooperatively with the many ethnic and cultural groups of our nation and world.

Arts and Humanities:

- Through the arts and humanities, students recognize that although

people are different, they share some common experiences and attitudes.

- Students recognize and understand the similarities and differences among languages.
- Students understand and communicate in a second language.

Vocational Studies:

- Students demonstrate skills and work habits that lead to success in future schooling and work.
- Students demonstrate skills such as interviewing, writing resumes, and completing applications that are needed to be accepted into college or other postsecondary training or to get a job.

Barriers

The reasons given by some educators for not implementing student email include the following:

- fear of liability in rare cases of inappropriate use
- lack of knowledge of how to deal with inappropriate use
- lack of technical support to implement and support a large amount of student users
- lack of teacher training on compelling uses of student email

On the other hand, many schools and districts have already implemented student email and are using it well. Some have implemented it across the board, while others have phased it in. All use carefully designed implementation plans incorporating vigorous attention to the development, dissemination, and implementation of the Acceptable Use Policy.

Equity

Kentucky students have a wide range of social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. By ensuring equity and access to student e-mail schools not only "level the playing field" but raise it by eliminating the technology disparity between the "haves" and "have nots". Schools where every student has access to e-mail can expect and encourage their teachers to use the world as a classroom. Student e-mail—which after all is a communication tool as commonplace as using the telephone—is another vehicle for integrating technology into the teaching/learning process so that computer literacy becomes a seamless component of the curriculum for all students. Anything less deprives students who lack access at home of the skills necessary for success in school and the world of work. In addition, by incorporating appropriate use of email as an integral part of the teaching and learning process, students will learn how to use email in an effective and businesslike manner, rather than the casual chatting they may use at home with friends.

Email Successes

Jamie McKenzie's newsletter contained a [story](#) about the power of student email that is compelling. It only takes a moment to read and provides a colorful story of how powerful email can be for students.

There are many examples of powerful uses Kentucky teachers have discovered for student email. Several schools across the state ask students to email writing samples to adult mentors, who may be college students, regional writing consultants, professional writers, and other adult mentors. Using special features of email and Word, the student and the mentor can collaborate like adults do on their work. Communicating with an outside audience raises the student's level of interest in and concern about the writing to a remarkable degree. Examples of students making use of student email go back for over ten years, with stories from Kentucky being described in a book entitled "The Nearness of You." The

stories are glowing successes of students learning to write by emailing published authors to discuss ideas and to refine their work. Ten years ago, getting email to work reliably was a challenge; it took a dedicated teacher to make it happen. With KETS in place, every teacher and every student can and must participate.

Science teachers often require students to add to their research, communication with known experts in the field and email is the most convenient way to accomplish this. In a computer programming class, a teacher requires students to email assignments to him, avoiding pencil and paper altogether. He then emails them back his version of the program so that they can compare techniques and analyze the similarities and differences. Our state director of the Student Technology Leadership Program (STLP) receives emails from students regarding projects they are working on and regarding suggestions they have about the STLP. In social studies and foreign language classes, students are communicating with other students around the world to learn about various cultures and languages. The examples are endless, and the person-to-person connections made are powerful.

Conclusion

In addition to analyzing the basic documents of Kentucky education system, the Associate Commissioner for the Office of Education Technology held conversations with representatives of eight colleges and universities and determined that higher education expects students to have mastered the skills associated with the appropriate use of email when they arrive on campus. Community and technical colleges also expect this skill of incoming students. Many higher education institutions no longer offer courses on email use for their students. It is becoming a pre-requisite for entering postsecondary students.

This analysis of some of the bedrock documents upon which our work is

based leads to a conclusion that electronic communication has been bought and paid for by the citizens of Kentucky but has not been implemented throughout the state.

The question is whether or not it is reasonable in the 21st century to expect students to be productive and proficient without using email as one of their tools. In addition to communications examples listed above, one can go through each content area and find specific examples which imply or state explicitly that email is a logical, convenient, and efficient tool to be used.

Members of the Office of Education Technology have conducted local, regional, and state training sessions for instructional uses of email and recommended technical strategies for implementing it. They have disseminated examples of instructional email uses to district technology coordinators, technology resource teachers, classroom teachers and others. Attached to this document are some examples of instructional uses of email being used today in some Kentucky classrooms, instructional websites which require student email use to be effective, a local district plan for student email implementation, and other resources.

100% implementation of student email continues to be a top priority for the Office of Education Technology, and we are bringing all resources together to assist local schools and districts in making it happen.
